

*J. W. Morris,*

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THE

*From J. Cuthbert*

CIRCULAR LETTER



TO THE

GENERAL BAPTIST CHURCHES

For the Year 1794.

By JOHN EVANS, A.M.

Pastor of a Congregation meeting in WORSHIP STREET.

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**W**E cannot read the epistles of Paul to the primitive Churches, without admiring the soundness of his understanding, the extent of his benevolence, and the ardor of his zeal. The soundness of his understanding is manifested by the just estimation which he made of spiritual objects. The extent of his benevolence is displayed in the activity of his labours. The ardor of his zeal is conspicuous in the unwearied industry and in the unremitting perseverance with which he devised and executed plans, eminently adapted to facilitate the recovery and ensure the salvation of the human race.

In one part of his writings, the Apostle apologizes for the ardent zeal, which he and his fellow laborers discovered, in spreading the religion of Jesus amongst the surrounding nations. This apology is founded on the grand motives by which they were actuated, and on the beneficial effects which resulted from their combined exertions in behalf of Religion and Virtue. Under these forcible impressions, and with these elevated views the Apostle exclaimed,

THE LOVE OF CHRIST CONSTRAINETH US.

CHRIST is the only begotten son of God, the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his person. His love induced him to descend from heaven, that he might seek and save those who were lost. Mankind, having through sin forfeited the divine favor, might have been abandoned to the blackness of darkness for ever. But the Son of God kindly interposed for their relief. After a train of Prophecies had been delivered — a series of miracles performed — and a succession of events taken place, the Messiah appeared in the fulness of time a light or a luminary to enlighten the gentiles and the glory of his present dispersed people Israel. By him was accomplished the vast design of reconciling Man to his Maker, of bringing him

*from darkness to marvellous light and from the power of sin and satan to the true and living God.*

This reconciliation the SAVIOUR effects by the doctrines he taught — the precepts he enjoined — the institutions he appointed — the sacrifice he offered up — and the discoveries he has afforded of the invisible world. *Touched with a feeling of our infirmities, Jesus the high Priest of our profession*, marks the dangers and compassionates the distresses incident to the different conditions of humanity. Are you dark? He sheds light. Are you smitten with a sense of guilt? He confers pardon. Are you oppressed with a spirit of dejection? He cheers the hearts of the disconsolate. Are you affrighted by the approach of death? He assures you, it is the gate of life. Do you shrink back from the tremendous realities of Eternity? He points to *the many mansions in his Father's house*, where his love which beams faintly on us here, shall burst on our astonish'd sight in its full splendor and glory.

But how does this *love of Christ* constrain those who experience its influence?

Our Translators, by adopting the term *constrain* in the present connection, have not discovered their usual felicity of expression. It implies a force inimical to the freedom of the human faculties. The Prisoner is *constrained* to keep within his Prison walls, and the Culpit to suffer the punishment due to his crimes. Constraint indeed of every kind, is generally productive of distressing sensations. The passage might be better rendered — the Love of Christ *bears us away*. Hereby intimating that the genuine professors of Christianity, are forcibly though pleasingly impelled, to entertain the ideas, cherish the dispositions, and perform the train of actions recommended and enforced in the gospel of Jesus Christ.



1. *The love of Christ*, should bear you away to ADMIRATION.

Admiration is a passion congenial to the human mind, and is generated by the contemplation of great and excellent objects. A spirit of admiration is excited by the spaciousness of the firmament — the immensity of the ocean — the magnitude of the heavenly bodies — the fecundity of the Earth and the sublimity of superior characters. But a still greater and more excellent object is the love of Christ, *who died for our sins and rose again for our justification*. To describe this love in its full extent, exceeds the ability of Man. His person, life, death, resurrection, ascension and second coming, are concerned in raising you from sin to holiness — from sorrow to joy — from Earth to Heaven. If the *love of Christ* has never touched your hearts to admiration, it is because you have never contemplated it. In a noble strain of sacred eloquence the Apostle broke forth; *O the height and the depth — the length and the breadth of the love of Christ which passeth knowledge*.

2. *The love of Christ*, should bear you away to GRATITUDE.

Admiration refers to uncommon excellence. Gratitude regards our being benefited by that excellence. That we may share the blessings flowing from the love of Christ, manifested in the redemption of Mankind, is evident from the consideration that *he died for the sins of the whole World*. Penitent Sinners therefore of every description, should be borne away by a principle of gratitude. Spiritual no less than temporal favors, demand the tribute of thankfulness. Are you grateful for the light of day, which the Sun pours around you — the salubrity of the air — the cheerfulness which health inspires — and the social pleasures of friendship? be still more grateful for the forgiveness of sin — the degree of purity obtained — the aid vouchsafed in seasons of difficulty

difficulty — and above all for *the sure and certain hope of a joyful resurrection to Eternal Life.*

3. *The love of Christ*, should bear you away to OBE-  
DIENCE.

Gratitude raises in the mind agreeable emotions towards the objects of our love. Obedience implies the cheerful and uniform exhibition of a temper and demeanor conformable with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The religion of the New Testament, is emphatically termed *the doctrine according to godliness*. Where godliness is wanting the doctrine has not been cordially received. Are you not grieved with the inconsistency of the Man, who adds not obedience to his admiration and gratitude? The disciples of Christ impressed with a powerful sense of obligation, are at all times and on all occasions, attentive to the moral and positive commands of their ascended Lord. One essential branch of evangelical obedience, is *the love of the Brethren*. In this state of comparative darkness and imperfection, vain is our expectation of an entire coincidence of sentiment and of an universal agreement in practice. Dismiss therefore puerile prejudices. Banish impertinent distinctions. Abridge not the rights of Christian fellowship. Preserve sacredly *the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, for there is one Lord — one Faith — one Baptism — one God and Father of all.*

Finally. *The love of Christ*, should bear you onward towards HEAVEN.

*It is appointed unto all Men once to die.* The most enlightened understanding — the most extensive benevolence — the most sublime virtue — and the most exalted Piety, shield not their possessor from the darkness and ignominy of the grave. "Death is driving on his triumphal car, and every moment crushing with his wheels, or mowing with his scythe youth, beauty, strength, grandeur, science, genius, virtue and piety, with undistinguishing and resistless fury." But blessed be God, the empire of Death is not eternal. *The Gospel of Jesus Christ,*

*Christ*, sheds its rays on the tomb, and by its superior radiance scatters those thick clouds which for ages had been hovering around it. Notwithstanding the awful silence which reigns in the abodes of corruption, *the trumpet shall sound — the dead shall arise — and those who have fallen asleep in Jesus shall be beautified with the garments of Salvation, and admitted into the paradise of God.* Ye mutilated families dry up your tears! Ye disconsolate mourners take down your harp from off the willows, and tune it to the praise of him, who is *the resurrection and the life!*

*Crowns of Glory, Palms of Victory and Robes washed white in the blood of the Lamb,* are the splendid representations of future bliss exhibited in the Sacred Writings. Where the abodes of glorified spirits are situated in the dominions of God; and what is the precise nature of their felicity, are points enveloped in a darkness which human sagacity is unable to penetrate. On these curious topics, learned and ingenious Divines have indulged much useless speculation. Sufficient is it for us to know, that the *same* God presides over both Worlds; that *an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled* is reserved for the righteous, and that it will be conferred at a time and in a manner most conformable to the dictates of infinite Wisdom.

In the mean time, rest assured, that the phrase **ETERNAL LIFE** imports a bliss of no inconsiderable magnitude. It includes the absence of every evil, and the presence of every good. On Earth, the purest are not free from sin—the most pious are not destitute of spiritual declensions—and the most generous are often requited with unkind returns, from the objects of their beneficence. In heaven, you will be secure from transgression — unexposed to danger and distress — and embellished with every grace and virtue. There, dwells the Savior in the refulgence of his mediatorial glory. There, will be assembled his Saints *of all nations and kindreds*

*dreds and people, and tongues who clave to him on Earth, who rejoiced in tribulation — and who are now raised to the fullness of joy which is at God's right hand, and to the pleasures which are for evermore.*

CHRISTIAN BRETHREN, borne away by the love that passeth knowledge — be admiration — gratitude — obedience and the expectation of a blessed immortality the governing principles of your lives. Numerous are the efforts of the enemy, to embitter your pilgrimage on Earth. Infidelity attempts to poison you with her pernicious principles. Enthusiasm endeavours to perplex you with senseless distinctions. Superstition aims at encumbering you with silly ceremonies. Nor does Worldly-mindedness, like the blasting mildew, cease to diffuse a contaminating influence. Of these dangers beware. Against these attacks, arm yourselves with a firm and rational attachment to the absent Savior. Fix your eye on the clearness of his doctrines — the justness of his commands — the utility of his institutions — the beauty of his example — the efficacy of his sacrifice — the truth of his resurrection — the prevalence of his intercession, and the certainty of his second coming *without sin unto Salvation*. Be your minds enriched with his instructions — your memories stored with his precepts — and your affections glowing with the fervour of genuine devotion. *Whom having not seen ye love — in whom though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.*

Now unto him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy — be glory and majesty — dominion and power — now and for ever, Amen.

F I N I S,

Life how short — Eternity how long!